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Article (Published Version)

Martell, Luke (2016) Anti-globalization, global protest and anti-capitalism. Polity Books website.

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Anti-globalization, global protest and anti-capitalism

Luke Martell

Short blog to promote second edition of *The Sociology of Globalization* (2017)

Published on Polity Books blog 25 November 2016

<http://politybooks.com/the-sociology-of-globalization-2nd-edition/>

The first edition of *The Sociology of Globalization* (2010) discussed anti-globalization movements since the 1980s. These are against capitalist or neoliberal globalization and for alternatives of human and labour rights, social justice, global equality, and democratic control. They're anti-war, ecological and concerned about human health. Anti/alter-globalization has involved big protests at gatherings of political and corporate power, from Seattle to Davos. They've been noisy, high visibility and oppositional.

The [second edition](#) (2016) expands on gender, the environment, China, cities, localisation, work, and on sociological theorists Bourdieu and Bauman. It updates on austerity, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, international migration, and the Internet. It also updates on international protest and anti-capitalism post-financial crisis and the development of the anti-globalization movement.

[Paul Mason](#) points to revolutions in North Africa from 2010 and anti-fees student protests and riots in the UK 2010–11. He highlights the rise of the Occupy movement from Spain to the USA and beyond, with the 'we are the 99%' slogan, and anti-austerity movements in Greece, Portugal and elsewhere.

Mason says these are internationally connected with common threads, despite different contexts. Participants include a new sociological type: 'graduates without a future'. They're young, westernized and secular. They face poor job prospects, in part because of economic depression and austerity policies after the financial crisis. They have access to expanding higher education, but funded by personal debt. Their welfare states and public services are being cut. Mason says there's a demographic bulge of youth in developing countries so large there isn't enough for all of them.

There are links to [Standing's](#) concept of the precariat, which stretches across the middle and working-classes, including public sector and industrial workers who used to expect security in employment. These groups have precarity in common, material and psychological.

Mason says more women are involved in recent global protests, including as spokespeople and organizers. The educated and professionals have high expectations not being met, making them politically restless. They mix with the very poor in social movements. Some of the poor get out of poverty, though on an individual rather than collective basis. So there is less working-class solidarity. Organized labour has been weakened. Mason says it gets wheeled on and off in global protests.

With older class movements you were a member or not, and once involved there was no temporary taking time out. In recent protests the young choose when to be involved and can retreat if things get too heated or draining. Protestors are involved in all sorts of activities: local, international, across

a range of issues, personal and creative. Mason says the new protestors aren't so sealed into ideologies, like socialism and labourism.

Social media gives them autonomous means of communicating. It's difficult for authorities to spread falsehoods because people on the ground can send smartphone counter-propaganda, photos or film to correct distortions. Social media undermines hierarchies and bureaucracy. It allows dissent to grow and people can organize a meeting or protest without, or despite, leaders. Ideas are spread by online sharing and liking, tested by peers rather than leaders or teachers. Face to face meetings or the printed word on paper, which has to be physically transported, was how we knew each other. Now there are more inclusive, accessible, autonomous ways, denser and faster.

Because of information technology and the expansion of higher education, people know more. In a generation mass knowledge has become freely downloadable. It can be accessed directly rather than pre-interpreted by the media, teachers, parents, priests or politicians, or controlled by dictatorships rewriting history and the truth. The old forms, libraries of paper books and hard copy archives of newspapers, are slower, more work to get to, accessible in smaller chunks at a time.

Mason says the young think beyond economic exploitation and class and have a better understanding of power. Hierarchies in their lives are not seen as purely personal and private but about power. Some protest may be less radical, against neoliberal capitalism as much as capitalism. But, for Mason, radical change is easier. You can bring down a system without taking to the hills weapon in hand or as an urban guerrilla. With international pressure and the Internet, Mason says, change can be made quickly, the Arab revolutions being examples.

Mason [generalizes](#) about phenomena that are specific. The youth bulge is more in developing than developed countries. Protests differ as much as share concerns; the struggle against Assad is of a different order to demonstrations against tuition fees. Graduates face unemployment in the post-financial crisis world but their chances are still better than for non-graduates.

Uptake of social media and smartphones is uneven. I.T. is available to the powerful as well as the powerless, and they can use it for propaganda, surveillance, and cyber-attacks. Bloggers and tweeters can be detained. Those in power can block and close websites, social media, and Internet or mobile phone networks. Revolution via smartphone faces tough opposition if confronted by military force.

Anti-globalization has moved around the world, from event to event. [Paul Chatterton](#) says one development has been into localism. [Urban social centres](#) with ideologies of anti-globalization and anti-capitalism have combined with bases in squatting, Occupy and movements for rights to the city against gentrification.

They are run by people with libertarian anti-capitalist beliefs. Some are grassroots activists, but they reach out to the local community, local needs, and the wider public. They provide venues for talks, films, language classes for refugees and other education. They have cafés, bars, libraries, host music events and art, and offer access to computing and meeting rooms. They give support where there has been privatization or public services have been cut. Some are co-ops, not-for-profit, run by volunteers.

Social centres are more outreaching than anti-globalization movements, open and not so overtly politicized, more about making links than confrontation. They're ongoing rather than on-off mobilizations, established in a local place and territorialized rather than globally mobile. They offer safe spaces aside from capitalism and the world of austerity, Brexit and Trump. They tend to be creating and constructing as much as oppositional or oriented to the state or parties; showing the possibility of alternative societies through experiment as much as propaganda.

Other alternatives to capitalism operate locally as much as via global protest. There are freeganism and [food countercultures](#), [co-ops](#), [radical towns](#) and [free education](#). These make spaces for alternatives, sharing, sometimes free rather than via the market and consumerism. They are about the social good rather than private gain and money, about cooperative control and ordinary people over leaders.

[John Holloway](#) says these are cracks in capitalism, people living in a non-capitalist way that can be expanded. They grow alternatives to capitalism within capitalism, as much as overthrowing it. There's prefigurative experimenting now rather than revolution to a society that's untried. The cracks are about being human, quality of life and self-determination. Some are occupied by people who don't fit in to capitalism, so need alternatives here and now.

Alternatives in society can be aside from institutions of state, party and workplace politics, but participants engage in the latter too, and it's important to do both. Anti-globalization and anti-capitalism are localized. At the same time, they're globally spread, internationally interlinked, communicate over space and are against neoliberal globalization. Globalism in anti-capitalism develops and varies but maintains its international dimensions.